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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 002251

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STATE FOR INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2013

TAGS: [PINR](#) [YM](#) [KPRP](#) [DOMESTIC POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEN OFFICIALS: AL-AHMAR AND SALIM SALIH MUHAMMAD

REF: A. SECSTATE 221932

[1](#)B. SANAA 2218

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alan G. Misenheimer  
for reasons 1.5, b and d

[1](#)1. (s) Answers are keyed to reftel questions. See reftel b  
for more information on prominent exiles returning to Yemen.

[1](#)2. (s) Salim Salih Muhammad:

[1](#)A. (s/nf) Why did President Saleh appoint Muhammad as his  
special advisor when he was Saleh's former political rival?

President Saleh has been keen on reconciliation with those  
leaders of the former PDRY who were exiled (or who exiled  
themselves) after the 1994 war. Observers believe his  
motives for seeking reconciliation are complicated and  
include several elements. Some believe he wants to ensure  
the Republic of Yemen can never be split again into north and  
south by keeping close tabs on the PDRY's former leaders.  
Others argue that President Saleh wants to balance tribal,  
military and Islamist influences through high-level  
appointments such as Salim Salih's.

[1](#)B. (s/nf) How is Muhammad viewed in Yemen?

Views about Salim Salih vary depending on one's political  
views. General People's Congress (GPC) members would tend to  
think he's "come to his senses" by joining the government,  
while YSP members and other oppositionists would view him as  
an opportunist who is just seeking a government position and  
power. He is also a long-time advocate for merging political  
parties, particularly YSP and GPC, both during early  
unification period and more recently in informal gatherings.  
Because he keeps a fairly low profile, it is unclear how the  
general public views him.

[1](#)C. (s/nf) What kind of influence does Muhammad have in the  
Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP)?

Salim Salih formally remains a politburo member of the YSP.  
However, there is no evidence that he ever attends meetings,  
nor do YSP leaders cite him as one of their leaders.

[1](#)D. (s/nf) What are his leadership and personality traits --  
does he have any influence or base beyond his YSP  
connections, e.g., among tribes or military officers?

He is a prominent member of the Yafaa tribe, which is one of  
two tribes which has kept to strong tribal ways in the south.  
The Yafaas are located in Lahaj governorate, although many  
of the most prominent leaders are businessmen in the southern  
port city of Aden. While he is considered a leader, he is  
not a shaykh. He does not appear to have mass popularity or  
a strong base beyond his tribe.

In July 2003, rumors circulated in Yemen that Salim Salih was  
being groomed for the Vice Presidency. The ROYG  
Vice-president Abdo-Rabo Mansoor was out of the country at  
the time. The rumors speculated that President Saleh would  
appoint him Deputy Chairman of the GPC at the next party  
congress, a position held by VP Mansoor. Rumors further  
noted that the President would appoint him Vice-President  
soon thereafter. (Note: Mansoor was the leader of a group of  
southerners called Zumra who fled to the north after YSP  
in-fighting in 1986. In 1994, the same group fought  
prominently on the side of the north. End note) These  
rumors have died down significantly since the return of  
Mansoor to Yemen later in July.

[1](#)3. (u) Additional bio notes: Salim Salih Muhammed is commonly  
known as "Salim Salih." He was born in 1948 in Yafa'a in the  
Lahj governorate, and is married with children. He graduated  
from Belqis College in Aden. From 1980 to 1985, he was  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic  
Republic of Yemen (PDRY). He was first elected Assistant  
Secretary General of the YSP after the bloody infighting of

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YSP factions in 1986. From 1990 to 1994, he was Assistant  
Secretary General of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and

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member of the Presidential Council of the Republic of Yemen. Salih was a member of the Presidential Council of the proclaimed separatist government of the South during the 1994 war (May to July). His 1994 to 2002 exile in the United Arab Emirates ended when President Saleh appointed him an advisor in May 2003. End bio notes.

14. (s) Abdullah al-Ahmar:

1A. (s/nf) As the reappointed Speaker of Parliament and the leader of Islah, how has his relationship with President Saleh changed since the Islah party lost votes in the April 27 election?

It appears that the relationship has worsened, although it is by no means ended. President Saleh called al-Ahmar "senile" in a televised interview with al-Jazeera in July 2003, shocking many observers. (Comment: None of the newspaper accounts of the interview mentioned the quote and it appears that a lid has been placed on discussion of the topic to prevent an escalation of personal tensions. End comment.) At the same time, the general rhetoric against Islah by GPC-affiliated newspapers and commentators has increased, in some cases calling Islah the "taliban" and hinting at terror connections.

1B. (s/nf) Is his tribal position of less importance now than before -- did the election results diminish his influence with the tribes?

There is no evidence that the election results have had any negative effect on his strong influence with the tribes.

1C. (s/nf) Are he and Salih equals, rivals or partners?

They are both rivals and partners. Al-Ahmar and Salih are not equals, but both have immense influence in different spheres. Saleh's personal control of Yemen's executive apparatus, particularly the government's revenue stream, budget process and -- above all -- the military, place Saleh in a pre-eminent position. (Comment: It appears that Salih no longer needs al-Ahmar like he did during and immediately after the 1994 conflict, when the Islah party and al-Ahmar played key roles in winning the war. Their partnership appears to come into play only when both sides have something to protect or to gain from it. End comment.)

1D. (s/nf) What is Abdallah al-Ahmar's familial/tribal relationship with President Saleh?

Al-Ahmar is Paramount Shaykh of the Hashid federation, of which President Saleh is only a member. There do not appear to be familial ties between them.

1E. (s/nf) What is his (Abdallah al-Ahmar's) relationship with Shaykh Zindani, for example, has he distanced himself from Zindani because of terrorism connections?

Al-Ahmar's exact relationship with Zindani is unclear, but does not appear to be close. During the election period, President Saleh gave Zindani a prominent role in the committee to ensure a Code of Conduct between the parties for a peaceful election. (Comment: Saleh's aims were probably two-fold, both trying to encourage a split by Islah's factions (tribal, religious and business) and highlighting the extreme side of Islah. End comment.) Before that, Zindani had been keeping a low profile in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

1F. (s/nf) Is he (al-Ahmar) as moderate and against terrorism as he claims to be or is there more of a story here?

Al-Ahmar's rhetoric claims to be against terrorism, and Post has no evidence that there is "more of a story." Some government measures to combat terrorism have been stymied by al-Ahmar, but the stated reasons are not linked to not wanting to fight terror. For example, the ROYG's efforts to strengthen their gun control law have been stopped by al-Ahmar, but on cultural and traditionalist tribal grounds (where the carrying of weapons is an important symbol) and for reasons of personal power.

1G. (s/nf) What information do you have on his (al-Ahmar's) sons, i.e., do they still have drinking problems and are disliked?

The sons are still widely disliked, and seemingly for good reason. For example, a wide-ranging shoot-out near the British Embassy in Sanaa in late 2002 was a direct result of one of the son's bodyguards shooting at British Embassy guards when they tried to limit the al-Ahmars' ability to park near the Embassy. The sons have also expanded their influence in political and business circles. For example, four al-Ahmar sons (from both the Islah and GPC parties) are now members of Parliament, causing many to joke that their caucus rivals that of the YSP (which has seven members).

1H. (s/nf) Is he (al-Ahmar) still on the Saudi payroll?

It is not known if al-Ahmar remains on the Saudi payroll, but he clearly has ties to the country. For example, in August 2003 he returned from the KSA after seeking medical treatment. In 2000, he was instrumental in helping to broker the Yemen-Saudi border agreement.

1I. (s/nf) Does he (al-Ahmar) retain other prominent foreign connections?

Some of his family members have married tribal leaders in other countries. For example, in June 2003 his daughter was allegedly killed by her husband, a tribal leader in Jordan.

1J. (s/nf) What are his (al-Ahmar's) major business/property interests?

The al-Ahmar Group is involved in the oil and gas services industry and imports military and police equipment. The group is also a major shareholder of SabaFon, one of the two prominent mobile communications companies in Yemen, and is part owner of Sabaa Islamic Bank and Universal Travel. The group also owns franchises for Kentucky Fried Chicken and Baskin Robbins. The Al-Ahmar family are reputed to be heavily invested in qat production.

1K. (s/nf) Do these affect/shape his (al-Ahmar's) politics to any agree?

He appears to be able to separate his politics from his business interests. For example, during the most recent war in Iraq, al-Ahmar called loudly for a boycott of American products, but he never closed his Kentucky Fried Chicken or Baskin Robbins franchises.

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